

Rhode Island

Winter 2003



Ag-Review

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Chief's Corner

by: Ken Ayars, Chief
RI Division of Agriculture

We celebrate Rhode Island Agricultural Day this year on March 25th at the State House. Similar to last year's event, we have reserved the rotunda and state room at the State House for organizations to set up displays and exhibits during the day and for speakers in the early afternoon. Last year's event was a tremendous success, with participation by a number of agricultural organizations and the former Governor, members of the General Assembly, DEM Director, etc. The enthusiasm and support for local farmers and agriculture in Rhode Island was obvious. We anticipate the same this year, and look forward to the opportunity to highlight agriculture in Rhode Island to our elected leaders. Your participation is welcome, and if you wish to set up a display or simply attend the event, please contact Ron Newman for more information at 222-2781 ext. 4518, or by e-mail at rnewman@dem.state.ri.us.

Two other important upcoming events are 1) February 27th, 2003 - A seminar on freshwater aquaculture opportunities in Rhode Island will be held at USDA. This is an outcome of a farm viability grant and the RI Freshwater Aquaculture Committee, and directed toward RI farmers and/or ethnic groups who are interested in aquaculture as potential farm income. Please contact Marilu Soileau, at USDA for meeting information, 828-3120, 2) March 12th, 2003- The Rhode Island Agricultural Education Coalition will host a statewide seminar at DEM, room 300 from 2 to 5 pm. This is also an

outcome of a farm viability grant, and will focus on the status of agricultural education in Rhode Island and opportunities for collaboration and improvement. Please contact Stu Nunnery for further information at 222-4515, or e-mail at riaec@earthlink.net.

Finally, as we enter a new year, a few words about agriculture in general in Rhode Island. There are many bright spots: 1) Rhode Island was ranked first nationally in a 2002 survey on direct marketing sales per farm (i.e. farmers markets, roadside stands etc), 2) The strength of the horticulture industry (nurseries, floriculture, turf etc, which accounts for over 60% of agricultural income in RI, 3) Start-up farms - while specific figures are not kept, I personally have been contacted in the past year by more individuals starting new farming ventures in Rhode Island than ever before. 4) Agricultural tourism and education utilizing public support and interest in agriculture to diversify farm income and educate school children and the public, (ie. school tours, corn mazes, pick-your-own operations.)

There continue to be issues and problems, which we must address head on and in collaboration if agriculture is to remain a viable entity in Rhode Island. The dairy industry in particular is threatened by abysmally low milk prices, and the market conditions and relationships must improve in the near term or we may lose a valued segment of the industry. Development pressure is intense, and results in a continual loss of productive farmland. There are efforts underway to address these and other problems, and a resurgence in public organizational and agency support toward maintaining a viable agricultural industry. We will meet the challenge!

Marketing Update

As we closeout the 2002 year, we thought we would take a moment to look back at what was accomplished last year in terms of marketing & promotional initiatives. 2002 was a banner year for marketing activities at the Division. We not only increased our advertising program 100%, we also established a new farmers market at Haines Park in East Providence.

Haines Park Farmers Market opened on July 10th and is the fourth farmers market sponsored by the RI DEM Division of Agriculture at a state owned facility. On hand were chefs from Johnson & Wales, celebrity DJ's, and of course lots of customers.

The Division administered the distribution of Farm Viability Grants. This was a first time event for the State of RI. The Division funded agricultural grant projects totaling \$370,000.

The Division also worked with USDA-RMA (Risk Management Agency) to develop and deliver a program to further educate RI farmers in the benefits for risk management products and tools. The Division through a grant from RMA developed a series of 12 seminars held in the 5 counties. Seminars were conducted by the SBDC of Bryant College.

The Division sponsored over 160 radio commercial spots from July thru December featuring RI Grown. To compliment our radio advertising the Division sponsored an additional 25 newspaper ads featuring RI Grown, to heighten awareness of Farmers Markets, Roadside Stands and PYO's..

Our December Christmas Tree campaign in cooperation with the RI Christmas Tree Growers Association, featured the tree give away program with over 50 gift certificates from local growers were given away on the air, towards the purchase of a locally grown tree.

The Division contracted with Lamar Sign Company and had 12 traffic shelter ads for 3 months (July thru October) located within 5 miles of each farmers market. Total viewing is estimated at over 5 million.



2002 Traffic Shelter Ad

The Division sponsored or co-sponsored opening day events at every farmers market operating in the state. Events featured chefs from Johnson & Wales, pony rides for the children and celebrity DJ's with live broadcasts from the market sites.

During the 2002 market season the Division conducted a survey at several of the farmers markets. The results were as follows:

- 50 percent of all those surveyed had been to the farmers market more than once.
- 50 percent of all those surveyed had been made aware of the market through newspaper advertising.
- 32 percent of all those surveyed had heard about the market from radio advertising.
- 27 percent of those surveyed said they shopped at a farmers market at least once a month
- 17 percent reported shopping at least once per week.
- 54 percent of those surveyed rated their overall shopping experience at a farmers market as good.



Fishermans Farmers Market

Smithfield Pumpkin Sets New State Record

October 2002. A 934 pound pumpkin won the Rhode Island Giant Pumpkin Championship at Frerich's Farm in Warren. It also set a new state record. John Castellucci grew the great gourd on his property in Smithfield. It is the fifth time he has won the Rhode Island Giant Pumpkin Championship. Castellucci has held the record before: back in 1993, when the pumpkins topped off at a mere 532 pounds! Timothy Adams of Wood River Junction won last year's event with an 832-pound Rhode Island-grown pumpkin. The previous record was set in 1998 by Warren Cole of Warwick. His pumpkin was 920 pounds. The event is sponsored by the Rhode Island Pumpkin Growers Association and the RI Department of Environmental Management's Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing

Pesticide Briefs

Pesticide Continuing Education

Requirements for Pesticide Applicators

In order to maintain your private or commercial applicators certification, all certified pesticide applicators are required to attend recertification training. Private certified applicators are required to attend a minimum of four hours of training every five years. Commercially certified applicators must attend a minimum of four hours of training for each category which they are certified in every five years. The training session must be specific to each category which the person is certified in as well as other pesticide related training applicable to their pest control business. For private applicators, the training may either be specific to their main commodity that they produce, such as fruit, for example, or it may be general training for all private applicators.

Both private and commercially certified applicators can recertify by attending the category training session offered by URI and DEM in the specific to their type of certification. In addition, both private and commercial applicators may recertify by attending training sessions that are approved by the DEM /Rhode Island Division of Agriculture. The approval process is described below.

In order to obtain approval for recertification credit for trainings, the sponsor must request approval from DEM Division of Agriculture at least twenty days in advance of the training or meeting. For training sessions, which are held in Rhode Island, sponsors seeking credit must submit to the RI Division of Agriculture an agenda, which must include the topics, the time of each session, the description of each presentation, the speakers name and the biography of the speaker. For any training sessions held in the five other New England states, Rhode Island will honor recertification credits if the sponsor has obtained approval from the state in which the training is held. In these cases, the number of credit hours and the categories given for the training will be

determined by the host state, which approves the training. Sponsors who schedule training sessions for pesticide recertification credit outside of New England must submit a written request (including the agenda, topics, description of each topic, time of talks, speakers name and biography) to the Rhode Island Division of Agriculture and obtain approval at least twenty days prior to the training.

Certified applicators looking to receive credit must complete a state issued official recertification attendance form. The original recertification attendance form must then be sent to the Rhode Island Division of Agriculture for verification and data entry. Please keep a copy of the attendance sheets for your records. After the data is entered, the form is mailed back to the applicator.

At this time, only certified applicators must obtain recertification credits. Those who hold a commercial license or a dealer's license are not required to recertify in Rhode Island.

Winter-Spring Training Schedule 2003

Core II Day 1 Mar 5 Wed/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Day 2 Mar 21 Fri/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Core III Day 1 Mar 26 Wed/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Day 2 April 9 Wed/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Core IV Day 1 May 7 Wed/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Day 2 May 21 Wed/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Core V Day 1 July 17 Thurs/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Day 2 July 24 Thurs/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 6 Right of Way Mon Mar 17/ URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 2 Forestry Wed Apr 2 / URI Kingston-East Farm 8am-4pm

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Winter-Spring Training Schedule 2003

Category 3A Shade Tree Wed Apr 2 /URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 7B Termites Wed April 23/URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 7E Mosquito Fri Apr. 25/URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 8 Public Health Fri Apr 25/URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 7A Household Wed Apr 30 /URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Category 7D Vertebrate Wed. Apr 30/URI

Kingston- East Farm 8am-4pm

Animal Health Issues

All Birds and Hatching Eggs From Out of State Must Be Permitted

The Department of Environmental Management has announced a ban on the importation of all species of birds and hatching eggs from all states with known infections of Exotic Newcastle Disease, currently confirmed in California, Nevada and Arizona.

DEM also issues a reminder that Rhode Island state law already specifies that anyone — private citizen or commercial company — importing, moving, selling or possessing any species of birds and eggs from any state or country must obtain a license or permit from the animal health section of the department.

Exotic Newcastle Disease is considered one of the most infectious avian diseases in the world. It is, therefore, mandatory to report any suspected case to the state veterinarian and to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) immediately. Exotic Newcastle Disease is a contagious and fatal viral disease affecting all species of birds including those often kept as pets, such as parrots. Backyard flocks of poultry; especially the gamecock species (often used for illegal cockfighting) are also a high risk. The current outbreak is directly linked to this type of activity.

The current outbreak was first confirmed in several California backyard flocks of poultry in October and spread to commercial operations in several California counties. It has since also been confirmed in Las Vegas County, Nevada, and, most recently, in Arizona.

The USDA has declared an extraordinary emergency for the affected states and established strict quarantines on all species of birds from those areas. A multi-agency task force is conducting door-to-door surveillance of all birds within the quarantine zones, and aggressive eradication protocols have been implemented. To date, over 1,470 farms have been de-populated and over 1,790,000 birds have been euthanized, with nearly 200 additional premises slated for eradication.

Many countries have banned the import of poultry, eggs, poultry products and meats, as well as all species of live birds, from the affected areas or the entire United States. The estimated cost of these export and industry restrictions is in excess of \$60 million per year.

The last outbreak in the U.S. took place in 1971 in the poultry industry of southern California. Almost 12 million birds were destroyed at the cost of \$56 million to taxpayers.

Exotic Newcastle Disease affects the respiratory, nervous and digestive systems of all species of avians. The virus is easily spread by the bodily discharges of infected birds. The virus can survive for several weeks in the environment and indefinitely in frozen materials. Some birds with the disease show no symptoms, but can shed the virus for over a year. Transmission to other birds and premises can occur by contamination of workers, equipment and materials moving in and out of infected areas unless strict biosecurity measures are practiced. Birds in the wild can also be infected and act as a mode of transmission or as a reservoir for infection.

Newcastle Disease virus can cause a transitory conjunctivitis in humans, but is generally limited to those who are in direct contact with infected birds or carcasses, and who are exposed to large quantities of the virus. Farmers and breeders or employees that raise and handle birds are not likely to develop conjunctivitis. The consumption of eggs or meat from exposed birds has not been reported to cause any illness.

For more information or to report any suspected disease or illegal movement of birds, or to apply for a permit, please contact the office of the state public health veterinarian, Christopher Hannafin, DVM, at DEM's Division of Agriculture at 222-2781. Ext: 4503

Additional information and updates on the status of Exotic Newcastle Disease around the country can also be found at the USDA website <http://www.aphis.usda.gov> or by contacting the office of the state public health veterinarian.



Plant Industry News

Rhode Island farmers who are experiencing crop damage caused by Canada geese can now obtain special out of season Federal permits. These permits allow for the taking of a specified number of geese (usually 10% of the flock) for the purpose of reinforcing non-lethal control techniques (bird cannons, shell crackers, screamers, scarecrows, etc). Since of the objective of these permits is to increase the effectiveness of these various frightening devices, it is essential that the farmer is attempting to control this crop damage through their use.

It is important to remember that these permits do not allow for the indiscriminate shooting of birds and as such should not be seen as a means of reducing populations of Canada geese. Presently, regulated hunting is the most effective means of controlling the Canada goose population and farmers should include the regular goose-hunting season as a part of their overall damage control program.

For a permit application and further information contact Don Wilda, USDA, Wildlife Services at 866-487-3297. Applications can also be obtained from the RI Division of Agriculture by contacting Jim Lawson at 222-2781, extension 4519.

Water Level Monitoring Report

One important function of the division is the routine monitoring of water levels within seven major streams located in Southern RI. Weekly water level measurements are taken at the Queen, Chipuxet, Usquepaugh, Beaver, and Pawcatuck Rivers and also at two locations along the Wood River.

The information that is recorded is entered into a database, which calculates weekly status of the rivers. With this information, the DEM/Rhode Island of Division can observe the monthly stream levels and determine if water levels may be a potential problem throughout the growing season. Because of this, streams are monitored year round so estimations of potential impacts can be made before the growing season. By doing this, the Division can better assist farmers with water concerns before it becomes a major issue. The US Geological Survey is vital to the success of this program as they have several monitoring stations which are monitored daily. The parameters for their studies are much more in depth and the Division utilizes this information quite frequently. By studying the weekly/monthly water levels, we are able to build our own database and look at historic data

to establish trends. This is helpful during low rainfall and drought conditions so emergency-permitting procedures can be put in place before the emergency actually occurs. For more information on the stream-monitoring program contact Lis Peterman at 222-2781; ext: 7261.

F-Y-I

The 2002 DEM/Rhode Island of Agriculture Harvest Festival was a success with a wide variety of exhibitors. One of the largest displays of John Deere tractors in the State of Rhode Island were on hand at the Warwick Mall. From a John Deere Tractor standing over 9 feet tall with over 50 horsepower to a 12 horsepower lawn and garden tractor, yellow and green was a great attraction for both young and older. As one individual stated; “these are big boys toys”. There were many different colors and varieties of fall mums displayed throughout the mall. Pumpkins weighing approximately 500 pounds, plants, agriculture displays, honey, and garden statuary were displayed from one end of the Mall to the other end. The Rhode Island Harvest Festival for 2003 will be held at the Warwick Mall from October 2nd thru the 5th, 2003.

In regards to Rhode Island dairy farmers, a cooperative has been established in order to receive a premium price on retail milk. This means you will be able to buy Rhode Island milk at your supermarket or local mini mart, and possibly delivered right to your door. Currently, farmers are receiving the same milk prices comparably to the mid to late seventies. In order to prevent high retail milk prices, Rhode Island legislation has been introduced to prevent price gouging. Some other New England States have also introduced similar legislation.

Coming Events

The DEM/Rhode Island Division of Agriculture will hold the 2nd annual Rhode Island Ag Day at the State House on March 25, 2003. Last years Rhode Island Ag Day was a huge success with Rhode Island Farmers and agricultural exhibitors. If you wish to set up a display or need further information, please contact Ron Newman at 222-2781; ext: 4518.

USDA REPORTS

The direct marketing of farm products continues to rise – the number of farmers markets is up 79% since 1994, according to the USDA. Farmers markets are now an integral part in the urban/farm linkage and have continued to rise in popularity, according to the USDA. The increase is mostly due to the growing consumer interest in obtaining fresh products directly from the farm, the report said. The number of farmers markets in the United States has grown dramatically, increasing 79% from 1994 to 2002. According to the 2002 National Farmers Market Directory, there are over 3,100 farmers’ markets operating in the United States. Direct marketing of farm products through farmers’ markets continues to be an important sales outlet for agricultural producers nationwide, according to the USDA. Small farm operators, consumers and communities benefit from the proliferation of farmers’ markets. For more information visit www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets.



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